

THE MATES OF MANIPUR:

THEIR ETHNOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Dr. W. Nabakumar Singh, M.Sc., Ph.D.
L. Doukhosei (Research Scholar)



Directorate for Development of Tribals and Scheduled Castes

GOVERNMENT OF MANIPUR

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IMPHAL - 795001

DIRECTOR
Tribal Development
Manipur



Tele. 221696 [O]
Imphal - 785001

FOREWORD

The Manipur hills are the abode of tribes. Some tribes are found in the valley, where they live with the Meiteis. There are 29 Scheduled Tribes in Manipur. They are, Anal, Aimol, Angami, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kacha-Naga, Kairao, Koireng, Kom, Lamgang, Mao, Maram, Maring, Mizo, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Purum, Ralte, Sema, Simte, Sokte, Tangkhul, Thadou, Vaiphei and Zou. And, there are a few tribes for which Government of Manipur has recently recommended for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Manipur to the Government of India, and Mate is one of such recommended tribes.

This Booklet, written by Dr. W. Naba Kumar Singh, Associate Professor of Social Anthropology in the Department of Anthropology, Manipur University and L. Doukhosei (Research Scholar), is an ethnographic profile of the Mates and highlights their origin, migration, settlement, population size, social and cultural life, family, kin-group, marriage system, Mate calendar and social and economic organisations. It also throws light on the religion, language, dances, problems and prospects of the Mates.

Dr. H. Kamkhenthang, Joint Director (Research), Shri. Samungou, JRO of this Directorate and Shri. S. Nishikanta, Prop. of Sangai Offset Printers extended help in making this publication possible in a very short time.

(T. PAMEI)
Director for Development of Tribals
and Scheduled Castes,
MANIPUR.

P R E F A C E

The present volume, as its name reveals, centres around the ethnographic study of a little known, unrecognised tribal community of Manipur – the Mates, a Kuki-Chin speaking people living mainly in three hill districts of Manipur – Churachandpur, Senapati and Chandel. The fieldwork which forms the basis of this study took place between October 1999 and January 2000 at most thickly populated, four Mate villages, namely Tengenoupal, Paldai, Tuibuang, and Twisomjang, that we selected as Mate culture-centres. We, however, paid visits to all Mate villages in order to get basic household data of the whole community. This study basically aims at presenting a profile of Mate ethnography along with some of the burning problems, that are being faced by them.

The list of those, who have offered help and encouragement before, during and after the period of fieldwork is long. We owe our deep sense of gratitude to Mr. H. Jamkhotang Mate, Chief of Tengenoupal village, Mr. T. Thangpu of Paldai Village, Mr. L. Thankanpao Mate of Tuibuang Village and Mr. L. Lenghao Mate of Twisomjang Village, who made our lives and works in the field easier and pleasanter through their kindness. We are also grateful to Mr. Thangkhotang Mate, who always lent us his hand with encouragement in the course of writing this booklet.

To Prof. Ch. Budhi Singh, Professor of Social Anthropology Manipur University we are deeply grateful not only for going through the manuscript of this volume but also for giving academic comments and suggestions. We also owe special thanks to Mr. T. Pamei IAS, Director for Development of Tribals and Scheduled Caste, Government of Manipur, for the personal interest he took in getting this volume published. We also wish to express our thanks to Mr. S. Nishikanta Singh, Proprietor, Sangai Offset Printers, Imphal for the trouble he took in getting this volume out of press with promptness and high efficiency.

We would like finally to express our gratitude to many Mate friends, whose names, for reason of space, are not mentioned here.

**DR. W. NABAKUMAR SINGH
L. DOUKHOSEI**

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Introduction :

The Mates – a name, in its literal sense, connotes front beaters and consequently, in the broadest sense as a designation, implies a migratory people – are a little known tribal community of Manipur, whose socio-cultural identity as a distinct tribe is yet to be recognised officially by the Administration. This demographically small but socio-culturally distinct community is still anthropologically virgin, for, except a few stray references (Gangmumei : 1968, Ranjit: 1990, Das : 1990, Mate : 1997, Rajesh: 1997 and Sobhapati : 1999) they remain untouched by anthropologists for both theoretical and modern, field ethnographic studies.

Many a tribe has undergone a sea-change in respect of its socio-cultural life under the deep impact of a number of exogenous sources of change, such as modernisation, westernisation, etc. on one hand and socio-cultural exploitation and absorption of the minor tribes by the numerically superior, technologically advanced and culturally dominating tribal communities on the other. It is not an exaggeration to say that such a phenomenon is a part of the social reality of the present day tribal situation in Manipur. Of the two realities mentioned above, the latter is, if not checked at least on time, socially fatal, for it has given birth to a number of attendant phenomena, to mention a few, such as ethnic clashes, identity crisis, ethnicity, etc.

The population of Manipur, over and above the core Meitei population, comprises twenty-nine recognised scheduled tribes and a number of numerically insignificant but culturally distinct tribes who are demanding a place among the recognised tribes of Manipur. The Mates, the Kharams, the Taraos, etc. are a few concrete examples. It may also be pointed out that studies of different academic nature on the colourful life of various scheduled and non-scheduled tribes of Manipur had been carried out by a number of scholars belonging to different academic disciplines. Such a study is, however, singularly lacking in case of the Mates who are, at present, experiencing various social problems and cultural constraints. If timely studies on this community are not taken up, the priceless, ethnographic materials will evaporate before our eyes resulting to the loss of an academic treasure for good. In the present study, the authors, with such a view in their mind, have made a humble attempt to study a brief but authentic ethnography of the Mate people on one hand and their problems and prospects on the other, on the basis of their personal fieldwork and surveys.

I. The people :

1.1. Origin and migration :

The origin of the people is shrouded in myths and legends. They do not have written documents that record their origin and course of migration. However, their oral tradition handed down through generations keeps story of their origin and migration alive in the form of folk-history. Songza, the great progenitor of the Mate people, as their folk-history narrates, once lived at *Nawipikhuo* (a subterranean region). One day, he, accompanied by his trained dog, named, *Ngeisen*, went on hunting in a forest. He saw a *salei* (Porcupine) and followed it till it hid itself inside a cave well-

guarded by *gulhemnupa* (a serpent couple). Returning to his people, he narrated the whole story of his hunting expedition and also counselled them to migrate to a new, green, fertile land that he discovered in the course of his adventure. They, after celebrating a grand community feast to mark the occasion of leaving their subterranean land, make their way towards the new land which they called *tungkhuonuo*m (the upper village). On reaching the mouth of the cave they endeavoured to get through it. But they were attacked by the serpent couple. *Songza*, who led his people in the journey, didn't, however, thwart his ambition. Accordingly, he covered his head with a *phuoipi*, a thick cotton cloth, and attacked the male serpent with *Jouditem*, a sharp sword. He killed the male serpent cutting it into two pieces. And, one *Songthu*, who was believed to be one of the strongest persons of the group, killed the female serpent cutting it into seven pieces. They, then, found a big stone blocking the other opening end of the gate of the cave. This time, another strong man of the group, *Zahong*, opened the gate of the cave, lifting the stone out of their way. They, thus, got out of the *khul* (cave).

Songza and his people, after a night's stay at a place called *Tualleiphai*, again started their journey. They followed the difficult, steep, terrain of the seven mountain ranges of Burma (Myanmar) until they reached the Chindwin river valley, where they established a village, called *Tualjang* with *Zamang*, the grandson of *Songza*, as their chief. They moved farther with brief sojourns at places like *Tualmun*, *Thuhial*, *Theilam*, *Hailam*, *Vongmol*, *Theimol*, *Kolkaimol*, *Anntaangkhuo*, *Khuochi*, *Tonpeo* and *Tongjang* till they finally came to *Zouyang* Valley, where they settled and flourished for several centuries. The people still keep in their mind, the prosperous life of their forefathers in *Zouyang* Valley. The belief that the terms like *Zouyang-Mate*, *Phin-Mate*, *Bal-Mate* were coined during the period of their prosperous settlement at *Zouyang* is still in vogue among the people. It is reported that the prosperous Mate settlement at *Zouyang* was completely destroyed by the *Pois* and their alliances in the *Poi-Mate* war¹. The likely time of the war is, however, beyond the memory of the people. Another Mate settlement at *Thangkhal*, as drawn from their memory, was also conquered by the *Suktes* in the *Sukte-Mate* war².

A section of the Mate, after the destruction of their settlement at *Zouyang*, migrated to *Tongniland* in the *Homalin* areas of Burma (Myanmar) wherefrom again they moved into the *Tangkhal* land, the present *Ukhrul* District of Manipur. They also sojourned at *Humlhang* and *Zalenbung* on their way to the present *Twisomjang* village, *Senapati* District, Manipur where they started a new permanent settlement under the chiefship of *Ziltong*, a great Mate historian and genealogist. The members of *Sunmang*, a sub-kin-group of *Langsun-Mate*, under the chiefship of one *Thangkhu*, founded *Khaukual* village in *Churachandpur* District, Manipur and later in the history of their migration, one *Khupchinkam* of the same group, established *Tuibuang* Village, the present district headquarters of *Churachandpur* District.

The *Sunlhun* group, another sub-kin-group of *Langsun-Mate*, as they suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the *Pois*, fled *Zouyang* and took refuge at *Thangkhal* for some time and then migrated to *Balbil*, *Chin Hills* wherefrom some of them, under the leadership of *Solim* and *Sohem*, came to *Aiyapurel* areas of Manipur (present *Chandel*-District) and founded *Salbung* and *Tuallaibung*

Villages. *Khuphol*, son of *Sohem* married *Ngullhing*, daughter of *MangvumHaokip* of *Samukhong* Village and settled there as he was given the status of *mantri* in the Village Council of his father-in-law. However, the Haokip-Mate ethnic conflict³ compelled him to leave *Samukhong* Village and establish another Mate village, called *Chehlepe*.

The *Haolim* group of *Langsun-Mate*, led by one *Loikhom*, founded *Tengnoupal* and *Lonte(Leiten)* Villages in Chandel District and *Thomjang* Village in Ukhrul District was founded by the *Chingthat* group of *Langsun Mate*. The *Chethang* group of *Mate* is believed to be the founder of *Humlhang*, *Maojang*, *Nabil* and *Sahomphai* Villages. *Sheilai* another major group of *Langsun-Mate* founded *Leisen*, *Twilumjang*, *Khuongmun* and *Changpol* Villages. The erstwhile *Lamjangtombi* Village in the Maring inhabited area of Chandel District and *Sehlon* and *Sarang* also at present located in Chandel District, are founded by the *Limsong* and *Phuthao* group respectively. The *Langgen (Taithul)* group of *Mate* founded *Zoumun*, *Khongtal*, *Paldai*, *Kathong*, *Mollen*, *Singtom* in Chandel District and *Sialna*, *T. Lhangnom*, and *Benazou* in Churachandpur District.

The story of their origin and migration, which the *Mates* tell from their folk-memory, remains subjective and conjectural and has also taken with a grain of salt, for there are no archaeological and historical evidences in support of it. It may, however, be pointed out that, though the story lacks in documentary evidences, the routes of their migration particularly in Manipur and the experiences they encountered are still within the living memory of the elderly members of the *Mate* people, and that is the driving focus around which the primordial sentiment of their separate ethnic identity, in spite of their close affinity with other cognate sister tribes of Manipur, is in the process of crystallisation.

I. 2 The present settlement :

Manipur, what is variously described as “a little paradise on the earth”, “a flower on a lofty hill” and “land of gem” is a tiny state, which lies in the extreme north eastern corner of India sharing a common border with Burma (Myanmar) on the east, Assam on the west, Nagaland on the north and Mizoram on the south. It lies between 23°50' and 24°4' North Latitude and 90° 20' and 94° 41' East Longitude and consists of an oval shaped, green fertile valley, geographically encircled by legendary, majestic ranges of blue mountains which constitute ninety percent of the state with an area of 20,089 sq.km. The valley which is about 790 m above the mean sea level has an area of 2238 sq.kms. The state, according to 1991 census, has a population of 18,37, 149 individuals of which tribals of various ethnic names account for 33.41 percent.

The *Mates* are at present found to be distributed over thirty villages, of which twenty are in the Chandel District, eight in the Churachandpur District and the remaining two in the Senapati District of Manipur. A thinly scattered *Mate* population is also found in Imphal, the metropolitan capital town of Manipur, Moreh, a border town, Sugnu and Pallel. The recently ended ethnic clashes between the Naga and the Kuki⁴ in general and the Kuki and the Zomi⁵ in particular, the agony of which is still fresh in the minds of the people and also visible in the deserted looks of the affected villages, have

brought about tremendous misery to the people even though they did not side with either of the warring tribes. It is reported that ten Mate villages, two in Ukhrul District, namely *Humlhang* and *Thomjang*, five in Chandel District namely *Lamjangtombi*, *Lonte(Leiten)*, *M. Zangnomphai*, *Khongtal*, and *Saman* and three in Churachandpur District, namely *Twilumjang*, *Maojang* and *Sasom* suffered complete destruction in the said ethnic clashes.

1.3. Population size and village-wise distribution :

The total population of the people, according to the census taken by the authors during the field work between October, 1999 and January, 2000 is 5328. A sharp decline in the population of the people is obvious when we compare the present population (5328 individuals) with that (7849 individuals) of an earlier study (Mate: 1997) conducted prior to the outbreak of the ethnic clashes. Such a phenomenal decrease in the population of this small community may be attributed to the mass exodus of the people of ten Mate villages consequent upon the demolition of their villages in the aforesaid ethnic clashes, either to the neighbouring tribal villages or to the far places like Imphal or Moreh, where they can earn their bread and butter by engaging themselves as rickshaw pullers or daily wage earners.

A list of the existing thirty Mate villages in Manipur along with the names of their Chiefs and populations is presented in Table No. 1.

TABLE NO. I
MATE VILLAGE AND POPULATION

Sl.	Name of Villages	Names of chief	District/sub-division	Population
1.	Tengnoupal	H. Jamkhothang	Tengnoupal Sub-division	1022
2.	Chehleph	L. Holkhokhai	Tengnoupal Sub-division	186
3.	Leisen (Tpl)	Sh. Holkhojam	Tengnoupal Sub-division	162
4.	L. Molphei	L. Jamlet	Tengnoupal Sub-division	66
5.	Nungkam-gannom	S. Thangtong	Tengnoupal Sub-division	9
6.	Zoumun	T. Jamkhothang	Chandel Chakpikarong Sub-division (302-150)	152
7.	Sahomphai	C. Zilkhothang	-do- (292-112)	180
8.	Singtom	T. Khupkhopao	-do- (291-91)	200
9.	S. Tampak	Ph. Ngulkhothang	-do- (293-100)	193
10.	Paldai	T. Tongchingthang	-do- (472-172)	300
11.	Kathong	T. Sonchinthang	-do- (109-0)	109
12.	Mollen	T. Semkhoching	-do- (203-23)	180

Sl.	Name of Villages	Names of chief	District/sub-division	Population
13.	Changpol	Th. Jamsei	Chandel Chakpikarong Sub-division (302-150)	117
14.	Bileijang	Thangtong Mate	-do- (155-50)	105
15.	Khangtung	Ch. K. Mate	-do- (173-52)	180
16.	C. Gamnom	Chingthat T. Mate	-do- (50-0)	50
17.	Sailam	Ch. Thanglian	-do- (165-51)	114
18.	Nabil	C. Paojangam	-do- (184-34)	150
19.	Sheilai Changpol	Sheilai Zilthang	-do- (133-38)	95
20.	Seklon	N. Mate	-do- (202-92)	110
21.	Tuibuang	Paomilian Mate,	Churachandpur.	410
22.	M. Khaukhual	Langsun E. Mate	-do-	252
23.	Phaisen	Thangkhen Mate	-do-	47
24.	L. Khaukhual	Langsun P. Mate	-do-	185
25.	Khuangmun	Sh. Thangkhanmang	-do-	118
26.	Bezaxou	T. Ngulhen	-do-	57
27.	T. Lhangnom	T. Taithul	-do-	182
28.	Sialna	T. Tongpa	-do-	102
29.	Twisomjang	L. Holkhulun	Senapati (362-116)	246
30.	Urangpat	Hoimun Limpao	-do-(218-109)	109
	TOTAL			5328

2. Social and Cultural Life :

Social Institutions :

2.1. Family :

Family among the Mates is patriarchal. Father is the bonafide patriarch with an absolute authority over other members of his family. The eldest son of a family enjoys the right of primogeniture. He is locally known as *Upa* and he is the future head and patriarch. A son is entitled to establish his family of procreation as soon as he enters upon the conjugal life. Nuclear family is, thus, the ideal type of family.

2.2. Kin-groups :

This petri-oriented society is organised on the basis of three internal major groups, namely *Langsun*, *Langgen* and *Chethang*, that are again sub-divided into a number of exogamous kin-groups. *Langsun* comprises twelve exogamous kin-groups, namely *Temang*, *Sheilai*, *Chingthat*, *Haoli*, *Limson*, *Sonlim*, *Limsong*, *Phuthao*, *Hoimun*, *Kumzel*, *Khumlam* and *Thathil*. Kin-groups of *Langgen* are *Ulchin*, *Kamkhual*, *Pathang*, *Thangsiyah*, *Suawnmang*, *Singlun* and *Kuntua*, and five kin-groups, such as *Sodou*, *Gouleo*, *Thangleng*, *Lengjil* and *Sawjang* constitute *Chethang*.

Kin-based associations, such as *Mate (Songza) Upa* council, Manipur, *Chethang Insung Kiloikhom*, Manipur, *Taithul Phungpi* Organisation, Manipur *Sheilai* Development Society, Manipur, *Chingthat Insung Kiloikhom*, Manipur and *Hasolim Inkuon* Society, Manipur are at present working actively to take care of the common needs and welfare of their members and to consolidate solidarity of the kin-groups in particular and the *Mate* people in general.

The twenty four constituent kin-groups of the *Mate* society have their own respective songs customarily sung at the time of the burial ceremony in the presence of the head of the kin-group, locally known as *Phung Upa*, as a farewell song to the departed soul of the deceased. Such a song, locally called *phung laapi*, is under a taboo on normal social occasions but a must on the occasion of burial ceremony, for no burial ceremony can take place without it. (Some specimen songs with their free translation are given in Appendix. 3)

2.3. Marriage :

Monogamy is the rule of the society except on certain exceptional, rare situations such as childless conjugal life, wherein the husband, if he chooses, is allowed to marry another woman. Levirate and sororate are the first preference of the second marriage of a widow and a widower respectively. Pre-and post-marital sexual relationship is not tolerated and dealt with severely. The custom of the payment of bride-wealth, locally called *man* or *mangkat*, is in vogue among the *Mates*. It customarily consists of ten mithuns, two large gongs, two necklaces and a pair of *Mate poundum* (shawl). The people prefer cross-cousin marriage. It is, however, known differently in accordance with reference to the sex of the ego. When the sex of the ego is male, it is known as *neih* (MBD) and the same is called *nii* (FZS) when the sex of the ego is female.

The traditional wedding is customarily officiated by a village priest, locally called *Siampu*. He makes a libation to the god of procreation so that the wedding couple is blessed with many sons and daughters. He also pours down a little quantity of *ju* (rice beer) over the couple three times, as a mark of blessing them. Thereafter the priest sacrifices a fully grown up cock to the god of procreation. He holds the cock by the wings with his left hand and the neck with his right hand, and observes the sporadic movements of the cock's legs in order to foretell the future of the married couple. He, then, sprinkles some *ju* over the couple by way of blessing them and also drinks some *ju*. At night the groom's family entertain relatives and invitees to a dinner and drinks. The *Mate* cultural rules oblige the married couple to live at the residence of the groom.

3. Cultural Institutions and Practices

3.1. Mortuary beliefs and practices :

The Mates ascribe unnatural death to the activities of the evil spirits who are believed to be the causal agents of different diseases and misfortunes. When a man falls ill rituals are performed to appease and propitiate the evil spirits in the belief that such propitiations will enable the sick person to recover from his illness. In the last resort, all the close relatives of the ailing person gather at the residence of the latter and pray to God to bring him back to life. When a man dies, a near male relative of the deceased stamps the floor, hammers the walls of the living house to make smooth the journey of the departed soul to *misikhuo*, the village of dead people, and sometimes fires a gun if the family of the deceased is in possession of a gun.

The sons-in-law of the deceased have certain obligatory duties towards the performance of the burial ceremony. The work of digging the grave is their sole responsibility. When the grave is completed the corpse is laid to rest with the personal belongings of the deceased, such as bow and arrows, spear, dao, tobacco-pipe etc. The grave is dug in such a way that the head of the corpse may face to the east while lying to rest. While the funeral ceremony is in progress members of the kin-group sing their *phung laapi* by way of giving last farewell to the departed soul. They also make a gunshot to ward off the evil spirits, locally called *Sikha*, who, as believed by them, lead the soul to the hell. A tomb pole bearing engraved human or animal figures is then erected on the grave mound if the deceased is a male. Such a tombpole erected on the grave mound of a woman bears engraved figures of basket and winnowing fans. This marks the end of the funeral ceremony.

3.2 Rules of inheritance and succession :

Both inheritance and succession, among the Mates, follow the male line only. Daughters have no right over the parental property; only sons are entitled to inherit the property of their parent in such a way that the eldest son gets the lion's share of it including the living house. Succession strictly follows the rule of primogenitor. In case a man dies without leaving any male issue his whole property, both movable and immovable, will pass on to the nearest male member of his kin-group. The person who inherits the property has to perform all mortuary rituals and pay debts of the deceased, if any. In such an extreme situation even, surviving daughters can not claim to their deceased father's property.

3.3 Traditional dresses and ornaments :

The people have their own traditional dresses and ornaments that are distinct both in pattern and colour from that of the other neighbouring tribal communities. Male dress is very simple and consists of a small loin cloth and a waist coat-like shirt made in their own style and fashion. A traditional shawl with black, blue, green and white stripes called *Poundum*, that bears ethnic identity of the people, is also an essential item of the male formal dress.

A woman customarily wears a kilt-like loin cloth, called *nik* around the waist and another knee reaching oblong shaped piece of cloth, called *pounve*, around the breast. Both men and women are

4.2 Traditional economic organisations :

Sawm and *Lawm* are the two organisations whose functions are concerned mainly with the economic life of the people.

***Sawm* :** *Sawm*, among the Mates, is an organisation that concerns both able-bodied young boys and girls of the village. It is an economic organisation in the sense that its members have to offer free and reciprocal labour service, whenever demanded, to any villager. It is also an organisation that imparts education, discipline and other essential training in socio-cultural duties to the youths of the society. It is a youths' dormitory. In olden days boys and girls used to stay and sleep in separate rooms of the dormitory.

***Lawm* :** It is an informal labour organisation of the Mate society. All the able-bodied man and women of the village, irrespective of their age and sex, join this organisation, which works in the strict principle of reciprocity. The number of work that a member earns working for other members will be credited to his name and will be repaid to him with labour on demand. This organisation, thus, keeps the village self-sufficient in the matter of physical labour through a chain of reciprocal labour which is being in operation among the members concerned. It is, on the basis of the age of the members, divided into three types, namely, *Lawmpi*, *Khangahk Lawm* and *Nawopang lawm*.

***Lawmpi* :** It is the major or principal *lawm*, whose members, as has been stated earlier, are able-bodied men and women of the village. They will continue their membership so long as they feel that they are physically fit for the same or until a time when their physical fitness is questioned by other co-members of the organisation.

***Khangthak Lawm* :** It is the *lawm* of the unmarried boys and girls whose parents and married elder brothers and sisters are the members of *Lawmpi*.

***Nawo pang Lawm* :** As evident from the literal meaning of the term, it is the *lawm* of the children, who are in need of undergoing training in cultivation work under the strict supervision of elderly persons.

4.3. Village Administration :

Among the Mates, village is the territorial group in whose behalf political activities are organised. A village is, therefore, an independent, political unit of the people. An attempt to understand their political life calls for a study on their village administration because, first and foremost, their political activities, beliefs and attitudes centre around their village.

***Traditional Administrative Body* :** Every Mate village is under the administrative jurisdiction of a hereditary chief, who is assisted in his administration by a team of individuals, who, in a hierarchical order, work in their own areas of jurisdiction under the supervision of the chief. The chieftianship, being a hereditary one, passes on from the father to the eldest son, who has got the title of *upa* in the family.

Management of judicial affairs, enforcement of customary laws, maintenance of socio-cultural practices and observance of religious performances are the areas of administration that a chief, exercising the power and authority vested in him, is concerned to look after.

The Mate political life, at the empirical level, is found to be intertwined with other spheres of social life, particularly, religion and kinship as power, the source of political activities, is found to be based on them. The office bearers of the traditional administrative body, key heads of the various kin-groups and religious practitioners in their hierarchical order is depicted in the diagram (Fig. 1) given below to show the relationship of political, religious and kinship organisations at the empirical level.

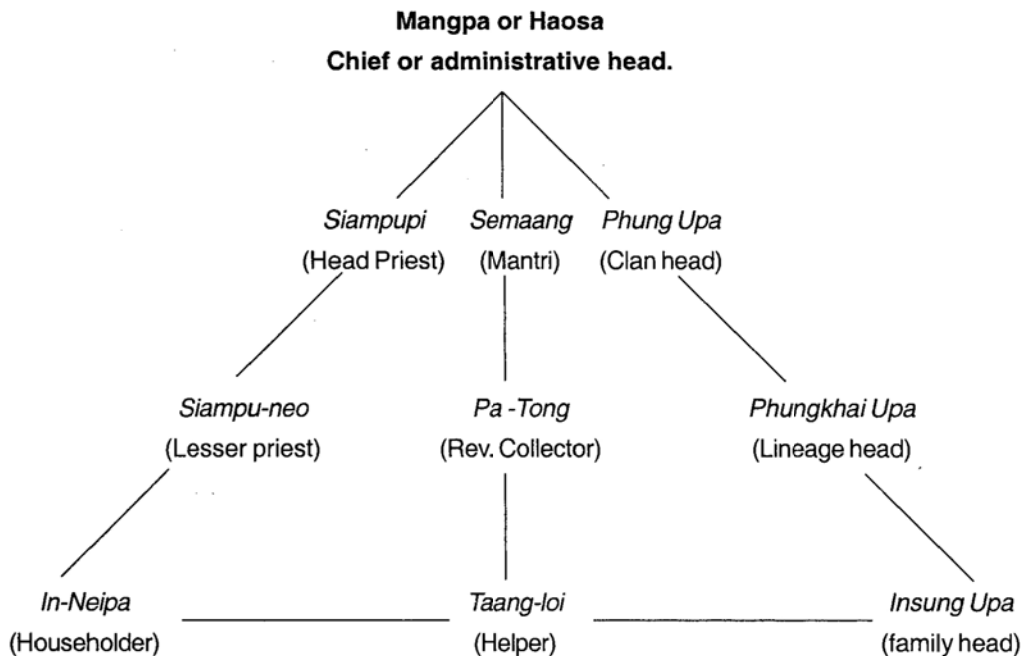


Fig 1.

Village Authority : India, after independence, has introduced a number of legislative reforms to safeguard the right of common citizens from the autocratic rules of the feudal land lords and tribal chiefs. This has brought about many a change in the political life of the tribal people who had autocratic political institutions. The Mates are also not an exception.

The Constitution of India under Article 371C(1) has empowered the Hills Areas Committee of Manipur State Legislative Assembly to enact Village Authority Act, 1956, in the tribal inhabiting hill areas of Manipur. Village Authority is an administrative body constituted in line with the directives laid down in the said Act. Such a Village Authority is headed by a Chairman, who is assisted by some members, who have been elected to the body. At present the Mate villages have their own Village Authorities; village Chiefs are the ex-officio Chairman of the newly constituted administrative

bodies. However, the other members of the Village Authority are elected members. Though some changes are evident in the functioning of traditional administrative body of the village, not much change is seen in the power and authority of the Village Chief as he is the ex-officio Chairman of the Village Authority.

Associations : Of late there has been a move among the Mates towards establishing their ethnic identity and asserting their cultural distinctiveness. Such a movement has given birth to a number of associations organised at the tribal level for the solidarity of the Mate People. Names of the associations are given below :

1. The Mate Tribe Council (MTC), Manipur
2. The Mate Students' Organisation (MSO), Manipur
3. The Mate Youth Union (MYU), Manipur
4. The Mate (*Songza*) Genealogical Committee (MSGC), Manipur
5. The Mate Anthropological Society (MAS), Manipur
6. The Mate Literature Society (MLS), Manipur
7. The Mate Culture and Customs Committee (MCCC), Manipur
8. The Mate Folklore society (MFS), Manipur
9. The Mate Development Society (MDS), Manipur
10. The Mate Tribe Recognition Demand Committee (MTRDC), Manipur
11. The Mate-Taithul Education Society (MTES), Manipur
12. The Mate Chief's Associations (MCA), Manipur
13. The Mate-Taithul Union (MTU), Manipur
14. The Mate Historical Research Society (MHRs), Manipur
15. The Mate Art & Culture Society (MA & CS), Manipur

4.4 The Mate Customary Laws :

The Mate customary laws mainly concern with what Radcliff Brown (1961 : 213) called private delicts. These laws in their basic forms are procedures for avoiding or relieving social dysphoria which results from conflicts within the community. Sanction, which is frequently both restitutive and repressive, may be either ritual sanction or penal sanction, according to the nature of the offensive deed. Though the Village Chief tries all cases with the help of the members of the Village Council, he has the prerogative of giving his own judgement. In Mate customary law a Chief is not regarded as having properly settled a case unless both parties are satisfied with the judgement. The customary laws relating to divorce, rape, seduction, theft, migration, etc. are described below :-

Divorce : If a man is found guilty of divorcing his wife on grounds having no concrete evidence or without any specific reason he has to pay a mithun to the parents of his wife and host a feast to entertain the Chief and the members of the Village Council. In case a woman commits the same offence, the members of her natal family, particularly her elder brothers, have to pay back all items of the bride-price that they receive at the time of marriage and later.

Rape and Seduction : The native law does not make much difference between a rape and a seduction and the same penalty is inflicted on the offender. A man who is charged with the offence of rape or seduction and proved guilty of the same is required to pay a mithun to the offended woman or girl as a compensation for the damage to her prestige and chastity. If the victim is a girl and the offender agrees to marry her, he need not pay the mithun but his family must arrange a grand feast to entertain the Chief, the members of the Council, relatives, the parents and relatives of the girl.

Theft : In case of theft, the Village Chief first seeks first information report from the plaintiff so that he can get a clue to the matter. A thief, according to the native law, is required to restore the stolen property to the person whom he has robbed. Moreover, he has to offer a jar of *ju*, rice beer to the Chief and also to kill a pig for a feast on which all concerned are to be entertained.

Migration : In case a villager has migrated to another village without any prior permission from and information to the Village Chief, the latter is entitled to confiscate all the property of the former including the standing crops in the field.

Inbua man : If a man or a woman dies in the house of another person who is not his or her relative, the next kin of the deceased is required to perform a ritual of pig feast to purify the family suffering from the ritual pollution.

The authority rested in the Chief by the tradition is considered unchallengeable. He tries to restore social euphoria whenever there is a social dysphoria in the village resulting from internal conflicts, having recourse to the native law. Noncompliance with the orders of the Chief and violation of the customary laws in any form on the part of the offenders lead to their expulsion from the village.

5. Religious life :

The people possess beliefs about supernaturals. Their religious activities centre upon belief in gods and spirits, who, according to their belief, dwell in various places of their surroundings, and performances of propitiatory rituals to appease them either at a specific time of a year or at a time when they feel that they are suffering from their wrath.

5.1 Supernatural forces and beliefs :

In Mate cosmology the highest God is *Tung-Pasian*. He is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He is the creator of the universe and dwells in the sky. The lesser gods, whom they call *dawi* are, according to their abodes, again classified into household god *Dawiin*, village deity *Khuodawi* and forest god *Dawigam*.

***Dawiin* :** Every household is believed to be presided over by *Dawiin*, who is the protector of the family. He is prayed and worshipped in order to protect the members of the family from other evil spirits who, according to their beliefs, interfere human affairs.

Khuodawi : The people worship *khuodawi* as the presiding deity of the overall welfare and prosperity of the village.

Dawigam : *Dawigam* is a jungle god who is worshipped by the people for their protection from malevolent spirits who are believed to dwell in gorging rivers and forest-clad mountains of their environment. They also believe in the existence of ancestral spirits, whose wrath and curse are believed to be the main causes of family misfortunes. They worship their ancestral spirits either to make themselves free from their deadly curse or to get divine blessing from them.

Pusha-pasha : A man feels in honour bound to perform this ritual when he is not in a position to keep up the prestige and heritage of his family. It is, thus, a ritual performed by individuals in honour of their ancestors in the hope of getting a blessing from them.

Pugao-pagao : The term, in the literal sense, refers to the deadly curse of the ancestors. When a person suffers from an unknown disease that cannot be diagnosed and treated successfully with the traditional magico-religious means, his relatives perform *pugao-pagao* ritual to appease the deceased forefathers because such a disease is attributed to the anger of their ancestors who have not been accorded proper propitiation.

Pigao-nugao : The literal meaning of the term is the deadly curse of the ancestresses. A man performs this ritual to make himself free from the wrath of his ancestresses. The motive behind the performance of this ritual is similar to that of the *pugao-pagao*.

Nigao : A girl, who violates the rule of cross-cousin marriage, is believed to be suffering from the curse of her father's sister. *Nagao* is performed by such women to appease the anger of their aunt.

6. Recreational Culture :

6.1. Dance and music : The cultural life of the people is also characterised by colourful dances and music that they use as medium of expressing the emotion, feeling and idea of their life. The main cultural dances are *Khul laam*, and *Suktat laam*.

Khul laam : This dance is performed in commemoration of great progenitor Songza's victory over demons and serpents of the subterranean country which he once ruled. Both male and female participate in the dance singing the following song :

Sit leikhulla kapenin,
Kapu Songza hungkhantou inn, (2)
Gulhem dougal hung sat jo in,
Kapu Mate hung khantou in,
Zouyang gamlei hung lo jo in,
Gal hang that in lojang thang ee.

Free translation :

Born at Khul (cave),
 Great grandfather Songza became prospered (2)
 Killed the great serpent,
 Great father became prospered.
 Won the Zouyang country,
 Killed enemy and became prospered.

Suktat laam : It is a bamboo dance performed by unmarried boys and girls on festive occasions. The participants wear head-gear decorated with colourful feathers.

The important musical instruments of the people are *sialki* (mithun horn), *khuong* (drum), *Dakpi*(gong), go-siam (a pipe instrument) and *theile* (flute).

The People: Problems and Prospects : The life of this little known community is not free from socio-economic problems and cultural constraints that are being faced particularly by the unrecognised tribes of Manipur. One is the inter-tribal political exploitation and the other is the problem of identity crisis or re-orientation that always goes, to some extent, in association with the former. Both are equally acute in case of the Mates. Even after fifty years of independence the Mates and some other non-scheduled tribal communities are still in an underdog position because of their inability to get adequate socio-economic facilities specially provided for them in our Constitution whereas, on the other hand, some groups are benefited more than they deserve and a new, socio-economically advanced category of tribals, which some scholars term "Tribal Elites" have come into existence consequent upon the disparity on the facilities received. The Mates, economically speaking, are the poorest of the poor, for they, being a non-scheduled tribe, cannot get adequate attention and protection from the Administration. One interesting but at the same time disappointing point that deserves a special mention is that the Manipur Secretariat so far does not have a single Mate employee. This is an empirical fact, that indicates their backwardness in the field of modern, formal education, which the poverty stricken Mates still consider a luxury. Their life is thus caught in a trap of underdevelopment— a trap composed of two social realities, one on the side of their economic life, and one on the side of their education, a determinant, criterion of their social development.

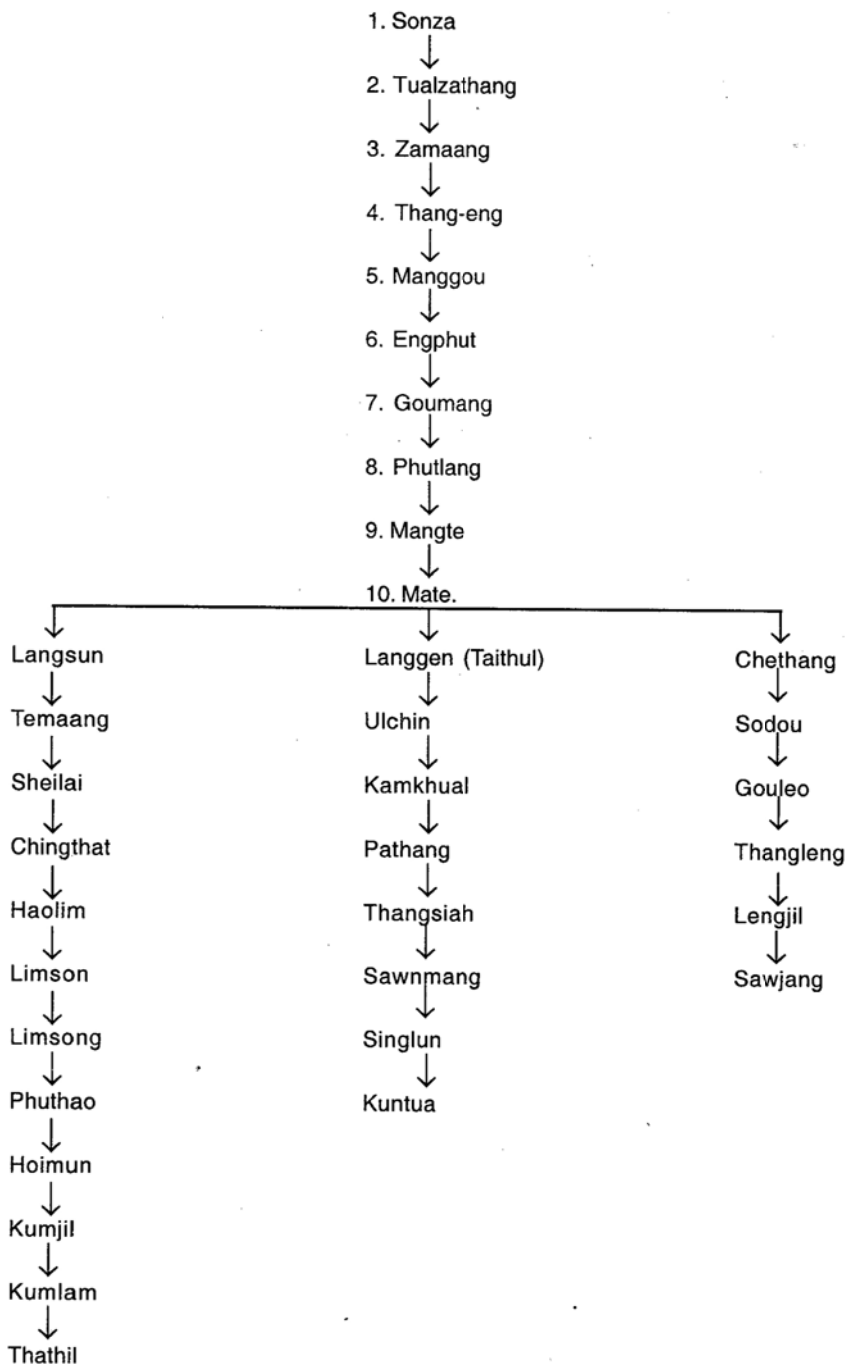
Another reality of the present day tribal world of Manipur is the newly, emerging phenomenon, what we call identity crisis, that has created an academic sensation, and attracted the scholarship of different academics. Many tribes, both recognised and unrecognised, experiencing this phenomenon, oscillate their identity between the two extremes of the Naga-Kuki continuum. A number of tribes which were once identified by British administrator—anthropologists as Kuki have changed their identity from Kuki fold to Nagas fold. The Purums and the Anals, to mention a few, are concrete examples. A deeper analysis has also revealed that many an unrecognised tribes, either in the Naga group or in the Kuki group, has oscillated its identity, not all the time willingly, towards the

numerically superior, politically dominant, recognised tribes. It goes without saying that a Mate, being a member of an unrecognised tribe, is compelled to give his identity as some other neighbouring, cognate, recognised tribes in order to get benefits from the government. Such an act leads to the suspension and suppression of one's identity. This again in turn compels the Mate fore-runners to assert their own distinct identity. This is reflected in the activities of the Mate Tribe Recognition Demand Committee, which has been submitting memorandum after memorandum to both the State and the Central Government seeking their recognition as a scheduled tribe. In such a critical juncture the Gangtes, who claim themselves to be a core tribe of which the Mates are a part, play a game of political sabotage going to Guwahati High Court and preventing legally the Mates from being recognised as a separate scheduled tribe. (A copy of the orders given by the Honourable Guahati High Court on the 4th November '98 in favour of the Mates is given in Appendix 4.) The Mates are, however, not thwarted in their ambition, and fighting their cause tooth and nail.

The Mates, whose life has been marred by their general backwardness, are in a state of transition. The recent phenomenal decrease in the population particularly after the Naga-Kuki and the Kuki-Zomi ethnic conflict is the reflection of their plight. Many are dislocated in respect of their identity and habitation. If such a condition is allowed to continue for a long time the future of this little known community is at stake. Protection from the both the State and the Central Government, the authors feel, will enable them to create a niche for themselves in the mosaic cultural setting of our state in particular and country, that earns fame and respect as the largest democratic country in the world, in general.

Appendix 1

Original genealogy of the Mates as narrated by their elderly members.



Appendix 2

Mate Language

The Mate language, that has some affinities to Teddim-Chin, Paite and Zou languages, belongs to the *Kuki-Chin sub-family of the Tibeto-Burman group of the Chinese language family*. A comparative statement in respect of the cardinal numbers (from one to ten) of Mate, Thadou, Lushai and Manipuri along with their English equivalents is given below in a tabular form.

Sl.No.	English	Manipuri	Lushai	Thadou	Mate
1.	One	Ama	Pakhat	Khat	Khaat
2.	Two	Ani	Pani	Ni	Nii
3.	Three	Ahum	Pathum	Thum	Thum
4.	Four	Mari	Pali	Li	Lii
5.	Five	Manga	Panga	Nga	Ngaa
6.	Six	Taruk	Pagup	Gup	Guah
7.	Seven	Taret	Pasari	Sagi	Sagih
8.	Eight	Nipan	Pariat	Get	Giat
9.	Nine	Mapan	Pako	Ko	Kua
10.	Ten	Tara	Som	Som	Sawm.

Appendix - No. 3

LANGSUN PHUNG LAAPI (Langsun Clan song): 1

Laa Khai

Gawipin beng bang pet sang in,
 Keiman beng bang pet jo nge e e e,
 Gawipin ta bang sang in,
 Keiman ta bang jo nge e e,
 Gawipin solang khai sang in,
 Keiman so lang khai jo nge e e,
 Sak teng a kadel dou,
 Ka phawl selin nang nang e e e,
 Tang teng a ka del gou,
 Kanam tem in nang nang nge e e e.

Laa non

A lam pa tou ting jot tang,
 Songkot na bon bang kapen,
 Laimi kop sel lang del tang,
 A vum a a han jai ka sak,
 A lel a sial lum kalo,
 Lim a lai tha sen sel le,
 Tawi gol hang lou ka sah le,
 Kei bou pasal pha hi nge e e e,
 Sim Tu nang bang khai jo nge e e e.

Free Translations :

*When tribesmen in sorrow, then,
 I shall bear the sorrow instead
 When tribesmen's son die,
 I shall become dead son's father instead
 When tribesmen die, then
 I shall become a dead man.
 I fight the enemy keeping spear up,
 And kill them, O! brethren,
 I fight the enemy
 With my tribe's sword, O! brethren.*

*I travel through the steep mountain ranges,
 I was born at stone gate (cave)
 I follow two tiger and killed them.
 I stand up and sing warrior-song,
 I become a mighty hunter,
 Under the tree's shade, I kill.
 Youth, brethren, though you call me a coward
 I shall be the only warrior,
 Who hangs enemy skulls on my wall.*

CHETHANG PHUNG LAAPI (CHETHANG CLAN SONG). 2

*A tui long suk haigtui ah,
 Thai niing sah le va khawi ju (2)
 Haipum ju baang ngaii inge e...
 Tuii ta lo e...*

*Gam lou pha hung kithang thang e...
 A tung ah nam tem toi ing e...
 A nawi ka kol tui in thawt ingee...
 Ton khuang jil nan nei na e...
 Hang khuang jil nan neina e ...*

*Suang kot a lum bang kapan,
 Pasal maang diing lailhu inge...
 Amiin phelgaw a toi leh,
 Tonglam lo chin toi na e...
 Keiman phelgaw ka toi leh,
 Tung va lhan mu saikha ee...
 'Jou juk'*

Free translation :

*Water flows in the Chindwin River,
 Honey bee and (2)
 I like, tasty rice beer
 Stored in gourd-bottle.*

*Famous, famous jhum land
 I cultivate upland with my tribe's dao
 And downland with my hoe.
 I perform tang-aii feast.
 I perform sa-aii feast.*

*With my war shield, I protect the village, at the stone gate
 I have become a warrior.
 When man carry bow and arrow,
 They carry it on their way to Jhum,
 When, I carry bow and arrow,
 I kill great eagle flying in the sky.*

SHEILAI PHUNG LAAPI (SHEILAI CLAN DONG). 3

Kalou vo tui som lou,
 Deitoh jataang kason na,
 Kalou vo tuisom lou,
 Deitoh bu min kason na,
 Kalou vo tuisom lou,
Laa – Deitoh muisi kason na,
Khai Kalou vo tui lou,
 Deitoh thawngbal kason na.

Janglei toni kaikon in,
 Gawlpi nu'n ginbang neikou,
 Pi va peh paih in ko tang,
 Jang a gawlsa hung khu,
Laa non Akawp ma kang thel ka phu,
 Temjam ma nao bang del ling,
 Tu'n lo nalung in gul tang,
 Tawi lo nalung in gul tang,
 Bawllui na vaang khuolai a,
 'Jou Juk'

Free translation :

My field, Oh'water confluent field,
 With my beloved I have harvested paddy,
 My field, Oh' water confluent field,
 With my beloved I have harvested millet,
 My field, Oh'water confluent field,
 With my beloved I have harvested sesamun,
 My field, Oh'water confluent field,
 With my beloved I have harvested Arbi.

When the sun rose from eastern valley,
 Tribesmen called me,
 I carried pi-bird in bamboo basket.
 Juvenile wild pigs gathered in the valley,
 I shot my arrows,
 And with my tribe's sword, I killed them,
 Youth friends remember in your heart,
 Old village where forefathers lived,

Appendix 4
IN THE GAUHATI HIGH COURT
 (The High Court of Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya,
 Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram & Arunachal Pradesh)

IMPHAL BENCH
CIVIL RULE NO. 955 OF 1998

1. Gangte peoples' Council through its President T. Dongzakai, Gangte, S/o L. Thangzam of Hill Town, Churachandpur, Manipur State.
2. Shri Thienlal Mate, Member Gangte Peoples' Council who is also General secretary of the Mate Insung Kiloikhom, Manipur State.

.. Petitioners

- Versus -

1. The State of Manipur through Chief Secretary, to the Govt. of Manipur.
2. The Secretary (TD & BC), Govt. of Manipur.
3. The Director of Development of Tribal & Backward Classes, Govt. of Manipur.
4. The Ministry of Welfare, Govt. of India through its Secretary at New Delhi, India.
5. The Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India through its Secretary at New Delhi.
6. The Mate Tribe Recognition Demand Committee, Manipur Head Office at Tuibong, Churachandpur through its Secretary, L.N. Thangpu Mate, Churachandpur, Manipur State.

.. Respondents

PRESENT

THE HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE J.N. SARMA

For the Petitioners :- Mr. H.S. Paonam, Advocate

For the Respondents :- Mr. Nimaichand Singh, Addl. Govt. Advocate, old. counsel for the Respd. No. 1 to 3, C.G.S.C., Id. counsel for the Respd. Nos. 4 & 5 and Mr. Ashok Potsangbam, Id. counsel for the Respd. No. 6

Date of order :- 4-11-1998

ORDER

There is no interim order. Pendency of this petition shall not be a bar to consider the matter in accordance with law. List the matter for hearing in the next week.

Heard Mr. Paonam, learned counsel for the petitioner, Mr. Ashok Potshangbam Id. counsel for the Respondent No. 6, Mr. Nimaichand for the respondents no. 1 to 3 and C.G.S.C. for Respondents No. 4 & 5.

Sd/- J.N. SARMA
JUDGE

Signature of the Copyist ;
(R.K. SURCHANDRA SINGH)

Read by :
 Compared by :-

NOTES :

1. Poi-Mate War : There is no written document, except the folk-history of the Mate, that records the Poi-Mate war. Consequently, nobody knows when the said war took place. However, Mr. Holkhokai Mate, the Chief of Chehlelep Village said, "The Pois invaded Zouyang Valley in 1823, and completely destroyed the entire Mate habitation consisted of two hundred households."

2. Sukte-Mate War : The Suktes, as recorded in the Mate folk-history, conquered the Thangkhal-Mate under the leadership of their Chief, Dok Tuang. (Mate 1996 : 6), on the basis of the writings of Carey & Tuck (1895) has estimated the likely date of Sukte-Mate War at 1887.

3. Haokip-Mate Conflict : The incident of Haokip-Mate conflict is within living memory of the people. The conflict took place in 1924 over the possession of a village, called Tualaibung located in Tengnoupal Sub-division, Chandel District, Manipur.

4. Naga-Kuki Conflict : The killing of one Onkholet Haokip, a youth and resident of Moreh, who, according to the Kuki National Army, (KNA) was an innocent person but a KNA cadre as claimed by National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issac-Muivah) [NSCN - IM] on the 3rd May 1992 in a clash between KNA and NSCN(IM) at a village called Bonjang formally sparked off the conflict between the Nagas and the Kukis. It soon turned into a vicious riot of ethnic cleansing. In the Naga dominated areas, such as Ukhrul District the Nagas cleansed all Kuki habitations torching Kuki villages and killing Kuki villagers. The Kukis retaliated by burning Naga settlements and killing Naga villagers in areas like Sadar Hills Sub-division, Senapati District, where they dominated over the Nagas. Killing and counter-killing continued for more than four years bringing horrendous consequences to thousands of innocent victims. The conflict, spreaded like a wild fire in the beginning, lost momentum as people became exhausted with the sufferings and miseries brought about by it. Slowly and gradually it came to a halt in the early part of 1997.

5. Kuki-Zomi Conflict : Though the root cause of the conflict was the hidden enmity between Kuki National Front (KNF) and Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) militants, the actual conflict flared up at Saikul Paite-Zomi Village, where on the 24th June 1997 KNF killed ten villagers on the charge that they, in league with NSCN(IM), instigated activities against the Kukis. On the following morning the Paite-Zomis burnt down Kuki houses and killed Kuki civilians in Churachandpur town. One attack was followed by another counter-attack and Churachandpur was in a tumultuous turmoil for about two years. On the 26th March 1998 the leaders of the warring groups signed a memorandum of understanding on the initiative of the State Government & Church leaders. It paved the way for bringing a long lasting solution to the problem of Kuki-Zomi ethnic conflict.

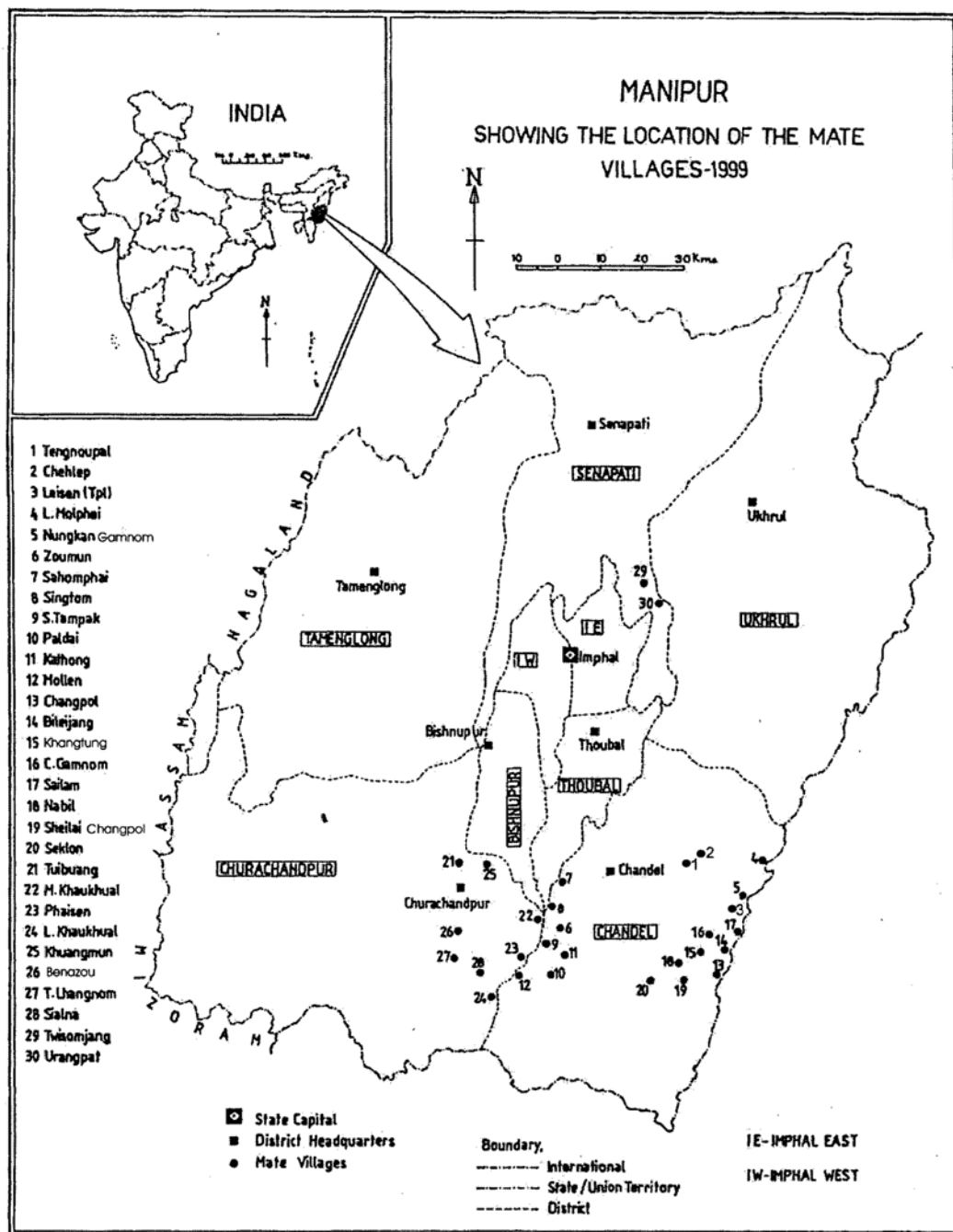
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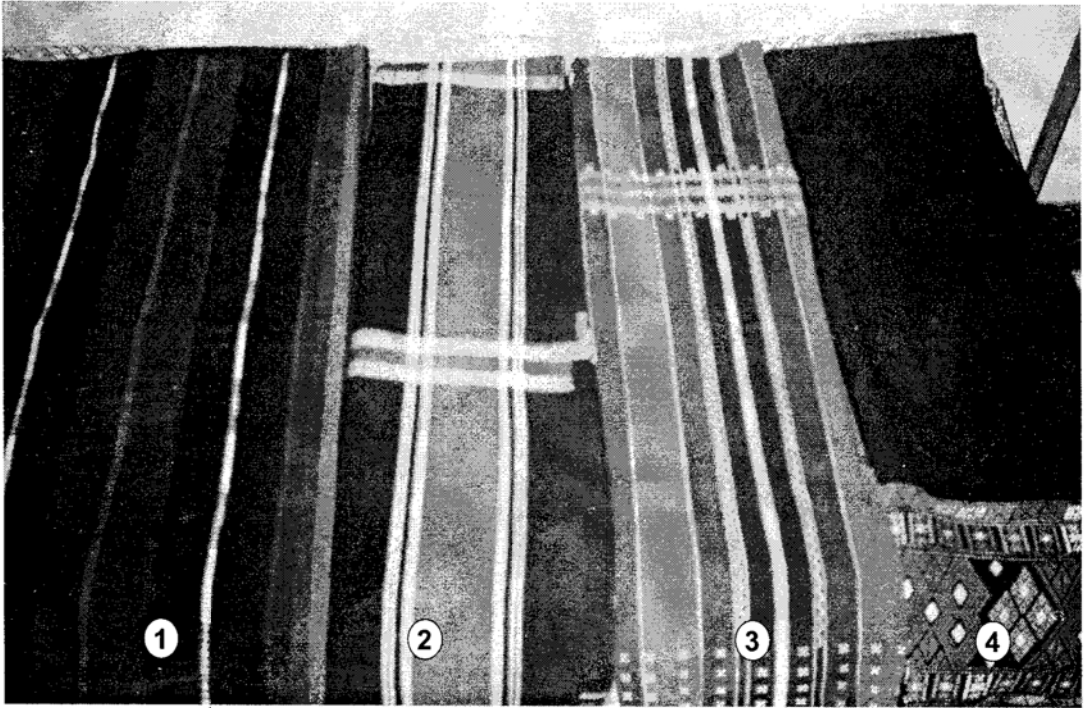
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PHOTOGRAPHS :

1. Two Mate belles in their traditional attire.



2. Traditional clothes of 1. Mate tribe, 2. Gangte tribe, 3. Zou tribe and 4. Thadou tribe.



3. Khul-Laam : Participants in action.



4. Suktat Laam : Dancing in progress.



5. *Khul Laam* : Participants getting ready for the dance.



6. *Suktat Laam* : Dancing on the village green.



7. The Mate cultural troupe in Saikul Kut festival.



8. A scene of Mate cultural dance performance in Saikul Kut festival.



9. Mate cultural dance troupe : Ready for participation in Saikul Kut festival.



10. Female participants of Mate cultural dance troupe : Pose for a group-photograph.



11. Mate boys and girls in traditional costumes.



12. Items of Mate material culture, Twisomjang village.



13. Mate youth on their way to Jhum field.



14. Mate hunters in action.

FIGURES :

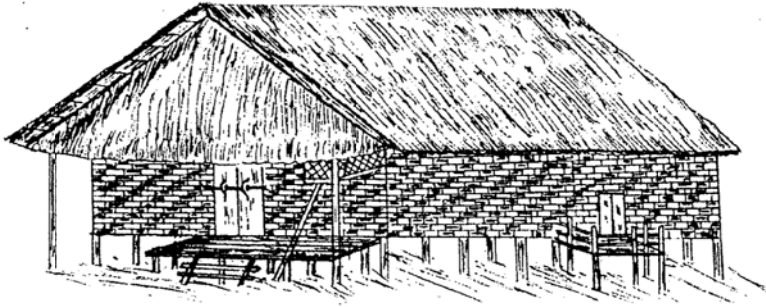


Fig. 1. Typical Mate dwelling house

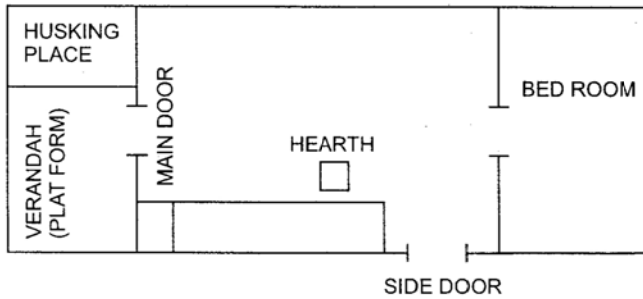


Fig. 2. Inside layout of a typical Mate house

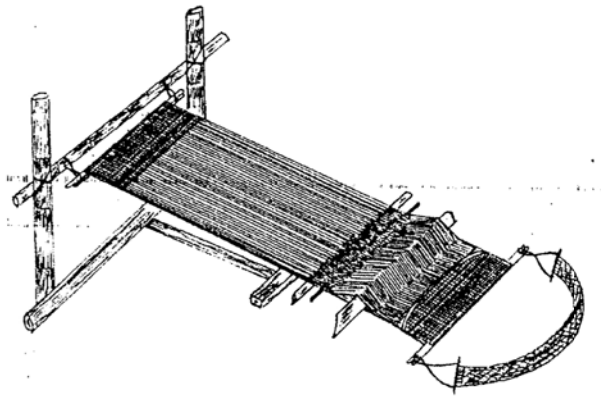
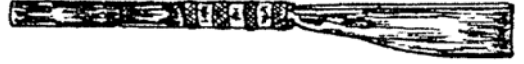
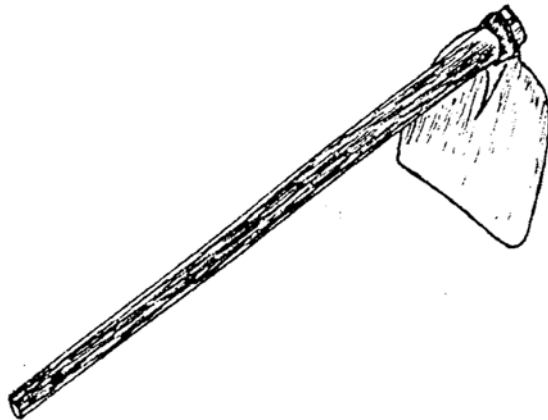
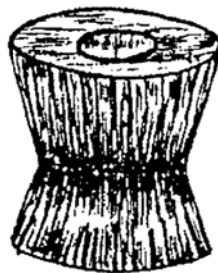


Fig. 3. A Mate loom

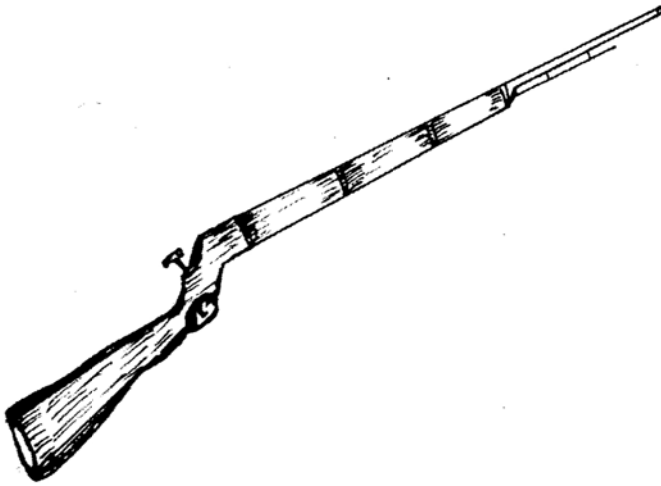
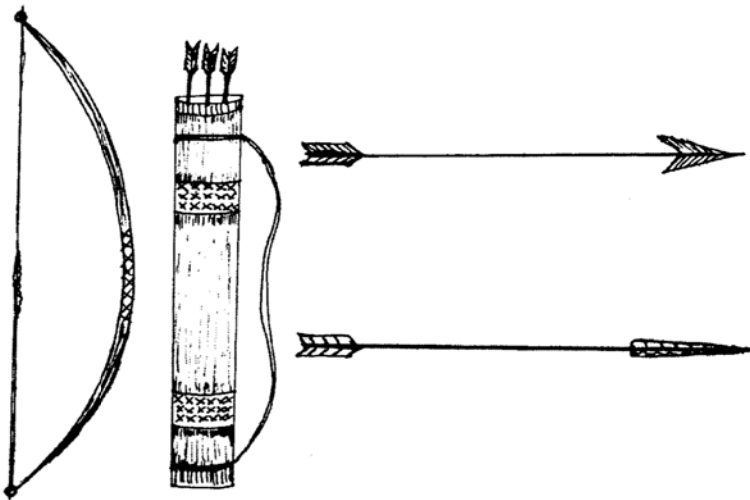
MATE AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS

Fig. 4. *Hei*Fig. 5. *Tempong (Dao)*Fig. 6. *Temneo (Knife)*Fig. 7. *Tuneo*Fig. 8. *Tadal*

IMPORTANT MATE HOUSEHOLD ARTICLES

Fig. 9. *Nam*(rope)Fig. 10. *Namkol*(rope with wooden support)Fig. 11. *Suk le Sum*(paddy grain husking implements)

MATE HUNTING / WAR IMPLEMENTS

Fig. 12. *Thao-Thel* (Gun)Fig. 13. *Thalpi Le Thal-Tang* (Bow & Arrows)

MATE HUNTING / WAR IMPLEMENTS

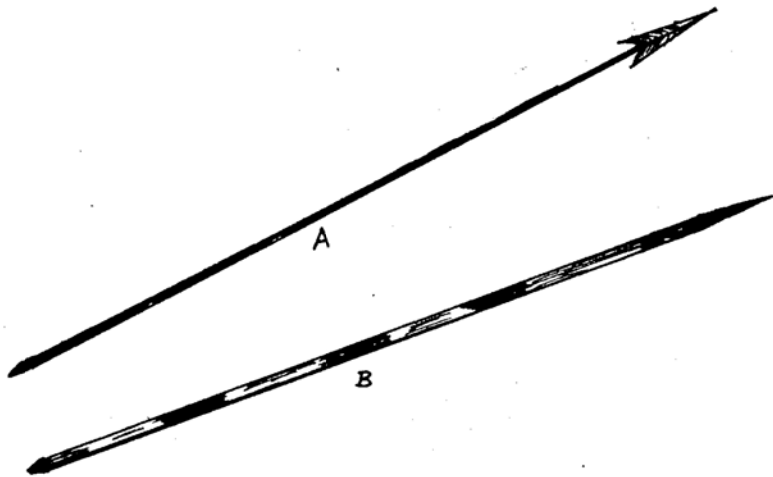


Fig. 14. A — *Sik-Teeng* (Iron Spear)
B — *Go-Teeng* (Bamboo Spear)

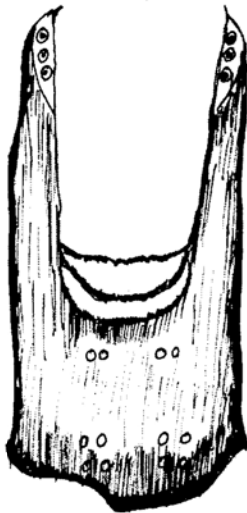
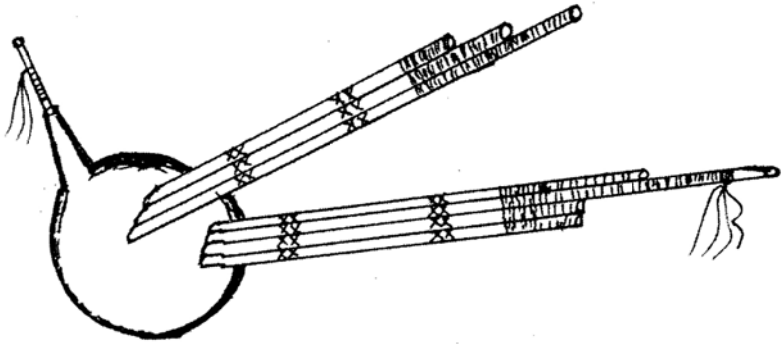
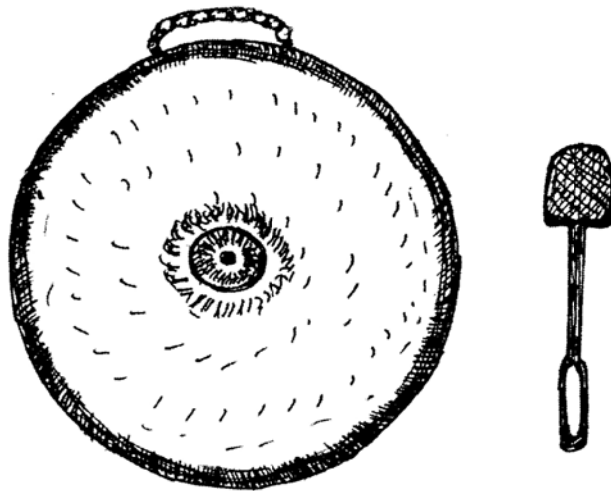


Fig. 15. *Jaksial* (Leather war jacket)

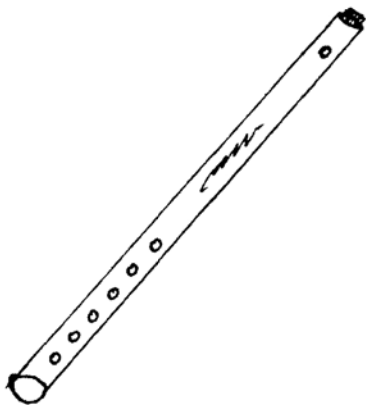
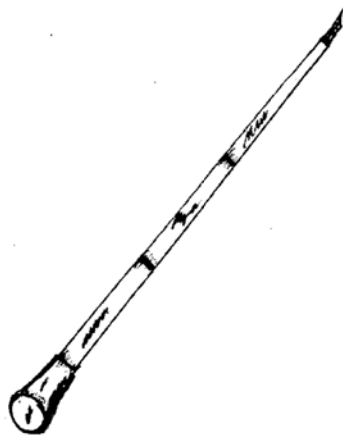
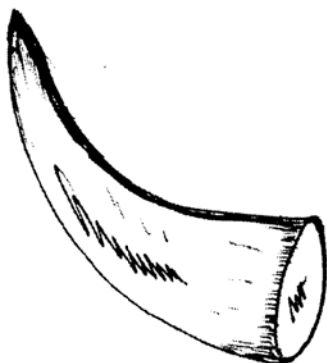
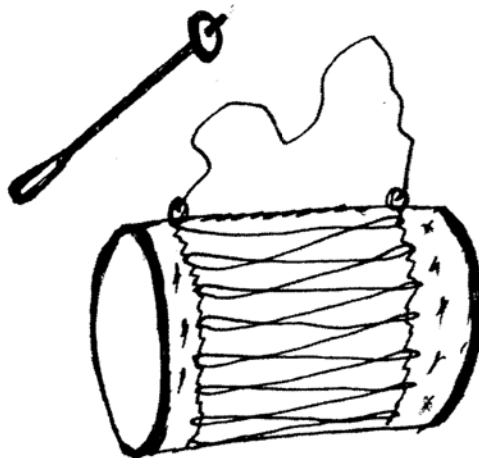


Fig. 16. *Tem-Jam* (Sword)

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Fig. 16. *Gosiam* (Pipe)Fig. 17. *Dak* and *Dak Mawl* (Gong)

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Fig. 18. *Theile* (Flute)Fig. 19. *Peengkool* (Trumpet)Fig. 20. *Sialki* (Mithun horn)Fig. 21. *Khuong Le Khuong Mawl* (Drum)

